

Tetum language

Tetum /ˈtɛtʊm/ (Portuguese)^[5] **Tetun** /ˈtɛtʊn/ (Lian Tetun), is an Austronesian language spoken on the island of Timor. It is spoken in Belu Regency in Indonesian West Timor, and across the border in East Timor, where it is one of the two official languages. In East Timor **Tetun Dili**, or **Tetun Prasa**, is widely spoken fluently as a second language; without previous contact, the Tetum dialects and Tetun Dili are not immediately mutually intelligible, mainly because of the large number of Portuguese origin words used in Tetun Dili.^[6] Besides some grammatical simplification, Tetun Dili has been greatly influenced by the vocabulary and to a small extent by the grammar of Portuguese, the other official language of East Timor.

Contents
Nomenclature
History and dialects
Vocabulary
Indigenous
From Portuguese
From Malay
Numerals
Combinations
Basic phrases
Grammar
Morphology
Personal pronouns
Nouns and pronouns
Plural
Definiteness
Possessive/genitive
Inclusive and exclusive "we"
Nominalization
Adjectives
Derivation from nouns
Gender
Comparatives and superlatives
Adverbs
Prepositions and circumpositions
Verbs

Tetun Dili	
 Tetun Prasa; Tétum Praça (Portuguese)	
 <i>Tetun Dili, Tetun Prasa</i>	
Native to	East Timor
Native speakers	390,000 (2009) ^[1] L2: 570,000 in East Timor ^[2]
Language family	Austronesian - Malayo-Polynesian - Central–Eastern - Timoric - Tetumic Tetun Dili
Dialects	Belunese (<i>Tetun Belu</i>) Terik (<i>Tetun Terik</i>)
Writing system	Latin (Tetum alphabet)
Official status	
Official language in	East Timor
Regulated by	National Institute of Linguistics
Language codes	
ISO 639-3	tdt
Glottolog	tetu1246 (http://glottolog.org/resource/language/id/tetu1246) ^[3]

Copula and negation
 Interrogation
 Derivation from nouns and adjectives
 Conjugations and inflections (in Tetun-Terik)

Tenses

Past

Future

Aspects

Perfect

Progressive

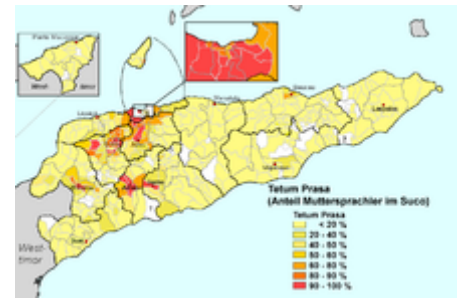
Imperative

Orthography and phonology

See also

References

External links



Distribution of Tetum Prasa mother-tongue speakers in East Timor

Nomenclature

The English form "Tetum" is derived from Portuguese, rather than from modern Tetum. Consequently, some people regard "Tetun" as more appropriate.^[7] Although this coincides with the favoured Indonesian form, and the variant with "m" has a longer history in English, "Tetun" has also been used by some Portuguese-educated Timorese, such as José Ramos-Horta and Carlos Filipe Ximenes Belo.

Similar disagreements over nomenclature have emerged regarding the names of other languages, such as Swahili/Kiswahili and Punjabi/Panjabi.

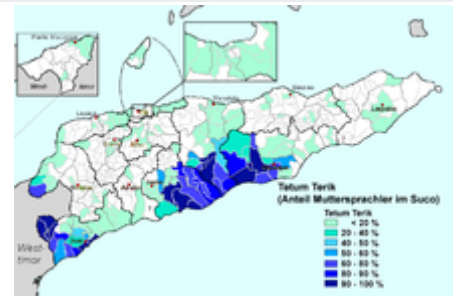
History and dialects

According to linguist Geoffrey Hull, Tetum has four dialects:^[8]

Tetum (Portuguese), Tetun (Lian Tetun)	
<i>Lian Tetun</i>	
Native to	West Timor, East Timor
Native speakers	500,000, mostly in Indonesia (2010–2011) ^[1] 50,000 L2-speakers in Indonesia and East Timor
Language family	Austronesian - Malayo-Polynesian - Central–Eastern - Timor–Babar - Tetumic Tetum (Portuguese), Tetun (Lian Tetun)
Dialects	Belunese (<i>Tetun Belu</i>) Terik (<i>Tetun Terik</i>)
Official status	
Official language in	 East Timor
Recognised minority language in	 Indonesia (East Nusa Tenggara)
Language codes	
ISO 639-2	tet (https://www.iso.org/standards/iso-639-2/php/langcodes_name.php?code_ID=42)
ISO 639-3	tet
Glottolog	tetu1245 (http://gl

- *Tetun-Dili*, or *Tetun-Prasa* (literally "city Tetum"), is spoken in the capital, Dili, and its surroundings, in the north of the country. Because of its simpler grammar than other varieties of Tetun, extensive Portuguese loanwords, and supposed creole-like features, *Ethnologue* and some researchers classify it as a Tetun-based creole.^{[9][10]} This position, however, is also disputed in that while Tetun-Dili may exhibit simpler grammar, this does not mean that Tetun-Dili is a creole.^{[12][13]} According to *Ethnologue*, there were 50,000 Tetun-Dili speakers in East Timor in 2004.^[8]
- *Tetun-Terik* is spoken in the south and southwestern coastal regions. According to *Ethnologue*, there were 50,000 Tetun-Terik speakers in East Timor in 1995.^[8]
- *Tetun-Belu*, or the Belunese dialect, is spoken in a central strip of the island of Timor from the Ombai Strait to the Timor Sea, and is split between East Timor and West Timor, where it is considered a *bahasa daerah* or "regional language", with no official status in Indonesia, although it is used by the Diocese of Atambua in Roman Catholic rites.
- The *Nana'ek* dialect is spoken in the village of Metinaro, on the coastal road between Dili and Manatuto.

ottolog.org/resource/language/id/tetu1245)^[4]



Distribution in East Timor of *Tetum Belu* (west) and *Tetum Terik* (southeast). The majority of Tetun speakers, who live in West Timor, are not shown.



Languages of Timor Island. Tetum is in yellow.

Tetun-Belu and *Tetun-Terik* are not spoken outside their home territories. *Tetun-Prasa* is the form of Tetum that is spoken throughout East Timor. Although Portuguese was the official language of Portuguese Timor until 1975, *Tetun-Prasa* has always been the predominant *lingua franca* in the eastern part of the island.

In the fifteenth century, before the arrival of the Portuguese, Tetum had spread through central and eastern Timor as a contact language under the aegis of the Belunese-speaking Kingdom of Wehali, at that time the most powerful kingdom in the island. The Portuguese (present in Timor from c. 1556) made most of their settlements in the west, where Dawan was spoken, and it was not until 1769, when the capital was moved from Lifau (Oecussi) to Dili that they began to promote Tetum as an inter-regional language in their colony. Timor was one of the few Portuguese colonies where a local language, and not a form of Portuguese, became the *lingua franca*: this is because Portuguese rule was indirect rather than direct, the Europeans governing through local kings who embraced Catholicism and became vassals of the King of Portugal.^[14]

When Indonesia occupied East Timor between 1975 and 1999, declaring it "the Republic's 27th Province", the use of Portuguese was banned, and Indonesian was declared the sole official language, but the Roman Catholic Church adopted Tetum as its liturgical language, making it a focus for cultural and national identity.^[15] After the United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor (UNTAET) took over governance in September 1999, Tetun (Dili) was proclaimed the country's official language, even though according to *Encarta Winkler Prins* it was only spoken by about 8% of the native population at the time, while the elite (consisting of 20 to 30 families) spoke Portuguese and most adolescents had been educated in Indonesian.^[16] When East Timor gained its independence on 20 May 2002, Tetum and Portuguese were declared as official languages. The 2010 census found that Tetum Prasa had 385,269 native speakers on a total population of 1,053,971, meaning that the share of native Tetum Prasa/Dili speakers had increased to 36.6% during the 2000s.^[17]

In addition to regional varieties of Tetum in East Timor, there are variations in vocabulary and pronunciation, partly due to Portuguese and Indonesian influence. The Tetum spoken by East Timorese migrants in Portugal and Australia is more Portuguese-influenced, as many of those speakers were not educated in Indonesian.

Vocabulary

Indigenous

The Tetum name for East Timor is *Timór Lorosa'e*, which means "Timor of the rising sun", or, less poetically, "East Timor"; *lorosa'e* comes from *loro* "sun" and *sa'e* "to rise, to go up". The noun for "word" is *liafuan*, from *lia* "voice" and *fuan* "fruit". Some more words in Tetum:

- *aas* – "high"
- *aat* – "bad"
- *ai* – "tree"
- *ai-fuan* – "fruit"
- *ai-manas* – "spicy sauce"
- *been* – "water"
- *belun* – "friend"
- *boot* – "big"
- *di'ak* – "good"
- *domin* – "love"
- *ema* – "person, people"
- *fatin* – "place"
- *feto* – "woman"
- *foho* – "mountain"
- *fulan* – "moon/month"
- *funu* – "war"
- *hamlaha* – "hungry"
- *haan* – "eat"
- *hahán* – "food"
- *hemu* – "drink"
- *hotu* – "all"
- *ida* – "one"
- *kalan* – "night"
- *ki'ik* – "little"
- *kraik* – "low"
- *labarik* – "child"
- *lafaek* – "crocodile"
- *lais* – "fast"
- *lalenok* – "mirror"
- *laran* – "inside"
- *lia* – "language"
- *liafuan* – "word" (from *lian* – voice and *fuan* – fruit)
- *lian* – "voice", "language"



Portuguese (left) and Tetum (right). From a Portuguese course for Tetum speakers. The text says: "Our generation sometimes has difficulty distinguishing between 'j' and 'z'"

- *loos* – "true"
- *loron* – "day"
- *lokraik* – "afternoon"
- *lulik* – "sacred"
- *mane* – "man"
- *maromak* – "god"
- *moris* – "life"
- *rain* – "country"
- *tasi* – "sea"
- *tinan* – "year"
- *tebes* – "very"
- *teen* – "dirt"
- *toos* – "hard"
- *uluk* – "first"
- *ulun* – "head"

From Portuguese

Words derived from Portuguese:

- *adeus* – "goodbye"
- *ajuda* – "help"
- *aprende* – "learn", from *aprender*
- *demais* – "too much"
- *desizaun* – "decision", from *decisão*
- *edukasaun* – "education", from *educação*
- *envezde* "instead of", from *em vez de*
- *entaun* – "so", "well", from *então*
- *eskola* – "school", from *escola*
- *governu* – "government", from *governo*
- *igreja* – "church"
- *istória* – "history", from *história*
- *jerasaun* – "generation", from *geração*
- *keiju* – "cheese", from *queijo*
- *komprende* – "understand", from *compreender*
- *menus* – "less", from *menos*
- *obrigadu/a* – "thanks", from *obrigado/a*
- *paun* – "bread", from *pão*
- *povu* – "people", from *povo*
- *profesór* – "teacher", from *professor*
- *relijiaun* – "religion", from *religião*
- *semana* – "week"
- *serbisu* – "work", from *serviço*
- *serveja* – "beer", from *cerveja*
- *tenke* – "must", from *tem que*

- *xefe* – "chief", from *chefe*
- *ideia* – "idea"
- *múzika* – "music", from *música*
- *esperiência* – "experience", from *experiência*
- *tecnologia* – "technology", from *tecnologia*
- *forsa* – "force", from *força*
- *eletridade* – "electricity", from *eletricidade*
- *terrorizmu* – "terrorism", from *terrorismo*
- *embaixada* – "embassy"
- *organizaçãun* – "organization", from *organização*
- *arkitetura* – "architecture", from *arquitetura*
- *kafé* – "coffee", from *café*
- *ekipamentu* – "equipment", from *equipamento*
- *prezidente* – "president", from *presidente*
- *froñas* – "pillowcases", from *fronhas*
- *aviaun* – "airplane", from *avião*
- *kompañia* – "company", from *companhia*
- *televizaun* – "television", from *televisão*
- *enjeñaria* – "engineering", from *engenharia*
- *korrupsaun* – "corruption", from *corrupção*
- *polísia* – "police", from *polícia*
- *fízika* – "physics", from *física*
- *profisaun* – "profession", from *profissão*
- *imposivel* – "impossible", from *impossível*
- *gitarrista* – "guitarist", from *guitarrista*
- *pasaporte* – "passport", from *passaporte*
- *mensajen* – "message", from *mensagem*
- *Natál* – "Christmas", from *Natal*

From Malay

As a result of Bazaar Malay being a regional lingua franca, many words are derived from Malay, including:

- *atus* "hundred", from *ratus*
- *barak* "much", from *banyak*
- *bele* "can", from *boleh*
- *besi* "iron", from *besi*
- *udan* "rain", from *hujan*
- *dalan* "way" or "road", from *jalan*
- *fatu(k)* "stone", from *batu*
- *fulan* "moon" or "month" from *bulan*
- *malae* "foreigner", from *melayu* "Malay"
- *manas* "hot", from *panas*
- *rihun* "thousand", from *ribu*
- *sala* "wrong", from *salah*

- *tulun* "help", from *tolong*
- *dapur* "kitchen", from *dapur*
- *uma* "house", from *rumah*

In addition, as a legacy of Indonesian rule, other words of Malay origin have entered Tetum, through Indonesian.

Numerals

- *ida* "one"
- *rua* "two"
- *tolu* "three"
- *haat* "four"
- *lima* "five"
- *neen* "six"
- *hitu* "seven"
- *ualu* "eight"
- *sia* "nine"
- *sanulu* "ten"
- *ruanulu* "twenty"

However, Tetum speakers often use Malay/Indonesian or Portuguese numbers instead, such as *delapan* or *oito* "eight" instead of *ualu*, especially for numbers over one thousand.

Combinations

Tetum has many hybrid words, which are combinations of indigenous and Portuguese words. These often include an indigenous Tetum verb, with a Portuguese suffix *-dór* (similar to '-er'). For example:

- *han* ("to eat") *handór* – glutton.
- *hemu* ("to drink") *hemudór* – heavy drinker.
- *hateten* ("to say") *hatetendór* – chatterbox, talkative person.
- *sisi* ("to nag, pester") *sisidór* – nag, pest.

Basic phrases

- *Bondia* – "Good morning" (from Portuguese *Bom dia*).
- *Di'ak ka lae?* – "How are you?" (literally "Are you well or not?")
- *Ha'u di'ak* – "I'm fine."
- *Obrigadu/Obrigada* – "Thank you", said by a male/female (from Portuguese *Obrigado/Obrigada*).
- *Ita bele ko'alia Tetun?* – "Do you speak Tetum?"
- *Loos* – "Right"
- *Lae* – "No."
- *Ha'u' [la] komprende* – "I [do not] understand" (from Portuguese *compreender*).



Tetum (left) and Portuguese (right). From a Portuguese course for Tetum speakers. The text says: "Some people pronounce wrongly '*meja', '*uja' and '*abuja' instead of 'mesa', 'usa' and 'abusa'."

Grammar

Morphology

Personal pronouns

Person	Number	
	Singular	Plural
1	Ha'u(-nia)	
1INCL		Ita(-nia)
1EXCL		Ami(-nia)
2	O(-nia)	Imi(-nia)
2(polite)	Ita(-nia)	Ita boot sira(-nia)
3	Nia (ninia)	Sira(-nia)

[18]

Examples:

(1) *Hau rona asu hatenu*
1S hear dog barking
"I hear the dog barking"

(2) *Nia sosa sigaru*
3s buys cigarettes
""He/She buys cigarettes""

(3) *Ita rona rádiu?*
1PL hearing radio
"Are we hearing a radio?"

(4) *Sira moris hotu ka?*
3P alive all ?
"Are they all alive?"

A common occurrence is to use titles such as *Senhora* for a woman or names rather than pronouns when addressing people.

Example:

(1) *Senhora mai hori bain-hira?*
Mrs come PAST when
"When did you arrive?"

[18]

The second person singular pronoun *Ó* is used generally with children, friends or family, while with strangers or people of higher social status, *Ita* or *Ita boot* is used.^[19]

Example:

(1) *Nina, Ó iha nebee?*

Nina 2s.FAM LOC where

"Nina, where are you?"

Nouns and pronouns

Plural

The plural is not normally marked on nouns, but the word *sira* "they" can express it when necessary.

feto "woman/women" → *feto sira* "women"

However, the plural ending -s of nouns of Portuguese origin is sometimes retained.

Estadus Unidus – United States (from *Estados Unidos*)

Nasoens Unidas – United Nations (from *Nações Unidas*)

Definiteness

Tetum has an optional indefinite article *ida* ("one"), used after nouns:

labarik ida – a child

There is no definite article, but the demonstratives *ida-ne'e* ("this one") and *ida-ne'ebá* ("that one") may be used to express definiteness:

labarik ida-ne'e – this child, the child

labarik ida-ne'ebá – that child, the child

In the plural, *sira-ne'e* ("these") or *sira-ne'ebá* ("those") are used:

labarik sira-ne'e – these children, the children

labarik sira-ne'ebá – those children, the children

Possessive/genitive

The particle *nia* forms the inalienable possessive, and can be used in a similar way to 's in English, e.g.:

João nia uma – João's house

Cristina nia livru – Cristina's book

When the possessor is postposed, representing alienable possession, *nia* becomes *nian*:

povu Timór Lorosa'e nian – the people of East Timor

Inclusive and exclusive "we"

Like other Austronesian languages, Tetum has two forms of "we", *ami* (equivalent to Malay *kami*) which is exclusive, e.g. "I and they", and *ita* (equivalent to Malay *kita*), which is inclusive, e.g. "you, I, and they".

ami-nia karreta – our [family's] car
ita-nia rain – our country

Nominalization

Nouns derived from verbs or adjectives are usually formed with affixes, for example the suffix *-na'in*, similar to "-er" in English.

hakerek "write" → *hakerek-na'in* "writer"

The suffix *-na'in* can also be used with nouns, in the sense of "owner".

uma "house" → *uma-na'in* "householder"

In more traditional forms of Tetum, the circumfix *ma(k)- -k* is used instead of *-na'in*. For example, the nouns "sinner" or "wrongdoer" can be derived from the word *sala* as either *maksalak*, or *sala-na'in*. Only the prefix *ma(k)-* is used when the root word ends with a consonant; for example, the noun "cook" or "chef" can be derived from the word *te'in* as *makte'in* as well as *te'in-na'in*.

The suffix *-teen* (from the word for "dirt" or "excrement") can be used with adjectives to form derogatory terms:

bosok "false" → *bosok-teen* "liar"

Adjectives

Derivation from nouns

To turn a noun into a nominalised adjective, the word *oan* (person, child, associated object) is added to it.

malae "foreigner" → *malae-oan* "foreign"

Thus, "Timorese person" is *Timor-oan*, as opposed to the country of Timor, *rai-Timor*.

To form adjectives and actor nouns from verbs, the suffix *-dór* (derived from Portuguese) can be added:

hateten "tell" → *hatetendór* "talkative"

Gender

Tetum does not have separate masculine and feminine gender, hence *nia* (similar to *ia/dia/nya* in Malay) can mean either "he", "she" or "it".

Different forms for the genders only occur in Portuguese-derived adjectives, hence *obrigadu* ("thank you") is used by men, and *obrigada* by women. The masculine and feminine forms of other adjectives derived from Portuguese are sometimes used with Portuguese loanwords, particularly by Portuguese-educated speakers of Tetum.

governu demokrátiku – democratic government (from *governo democrático*, masculine)
nasaun demokrátika – democratic nation (from *nação democrática*, feminine)

In some instances, the different gender forms have distinct translations into English:

bonitu – handsome
bonita – pretty

In indigenous Tetum words, the suffixes *-mane* ("male") and *-feto* ("female") are sometimes used to differentiate between the genders:

oan-mane "son" → *oan-feto* "daughter"

Comparatives and superlatives

Superlatives can be formed from adjectives by reduplication:

barak "much", "many" → *babarak* "very much", "many"
boot "big", "great" → *boboot* "huge", "enormous"
di'ak "good" → *didi'ak* "very good"
ikus "last" → *ikuikus* "the very last", "final"
moos "clean", "clear" → *momoos* "spotless", "immaculate"

When making comparisons, the word *liu* ("more") is used after the adjective, optionally followed by *duké* ("than" from Portuguese *do que*):

Maria tuan liu (duké) Ana — Maria is older than Ana.

To describe something as the most or least, the word *hotu* ("all") is added:

Maria tuan liu hotu — Maria is the oldest.

Adverbs

Adverbs can be formed from adjectives or nouns by reduplication:

di'ak "good" → *didi'ak* "well"
foun "new", "recent" → *foufoun* "newly", "recently"
kalan "night" → *kalakalan* "nightly"
lais "quick" → *lailais* "quickly"
loron "day" → *loroloron* "daily"

Prepositions and circumpositions

The most commonly used prepositions in Tetum are the verbs *iha* ("have", "possess", "specific locative") and *baa/ba* ("go", "to", "for"). Most prepositional concepts of English are expressed by nominal phrases formed by using *iha*, the object and the position (expressed by a noun), optionally with the possessive *nia*.

iha uma (nia) laran — *inside* the house
iha foho (nia) tutun — *on top of* the mountain
iha meza leten — *on* the table
iha kadeira okos — *under* the chair
iha rai li'ur — *outside* the country
iha ema (nia) leet — *between* the people

Verbs

Copula and negation

There is no verb "to be" as such, but the word *la'ós*, which translates as "not to be", is used for negation:

Timor-oan sira la'ós Indonézia-oan. — The Timorese are not Indonesians.

The word *maka*, which roughly translates as "who is" or "what is", can be used with an adjective for emphasis:

João maka gosta serveja. — It's John who likes beer.

Interrogation

The interrogative is formed by using the words *ka* ("or") or *ka lae* ("or not").

O bulak ka? — Are you crazy?

O gosta ha'u ka lae? — Do you like me?

Derivation from nouns and adjectives

Transitive verbs are formed by adding the prefix *ha-* or *hak-* to a noun or adjective:

been "liquid" → *habeen* "to liquify", "to melt"

bulak "mad" → *habulak* "to drive mad"

klibur "union" → *haklibur* "to unite"

mahon "shade" → *hamahon* "to shade", "to cover"

manas "hot" → *hamanas* "to heat up"

Intransitive verbs are formed by adding the prefix *na-* or *nak-* to a noun or adjective:

nabeen — (to be) liquified, melted

nabulak — (to be) driven mad

naklibur — (to be) united

namahon — (to be) shaded, covered

namanas — (to become) heated up

Conjugations and inflections (in Tetun-Terik)

In *Tetun-Terik*, verbs inflect when they begin with a vowel or consonant h. In this case mutation of the first consonant occurs. For example, the verb *haree* (to see) in *Tetun-Terik* would be conjugated as follows:

ha'u karee — I see

ó maree — you (sing.) see

nia naree — he/she/it sees

ami haree — we see

imi haree — you (pl.) see

sira raree — they see

Tenses

Past

Whenever possible, the past tense is simply inferred from the context, for example:

Horisehik ha'u han etu – Yesterday I ate rice.

However, it can be expressed by placing the adverb *ona* ("already") at the end of a sentence.

Ha'u han etu ona – I've (already) eaten rice.

When *ona* is used with *la* ("not") this means "no more" or "no longer", rather than "have not":

Ha'u la han etu ona – I don't eat rice anymore.

In order to convey that an action has not occurred, the word *seidauk* ("not yet") is used:

Ha'u seidauk han etu – I haven't eaten rice (yet).

When relating an action that occurred in the past, the word *tiha* ("finally" or "well and truly") is used with the verb.

Ha'u han tiha etu – I ate rice.

Future

The future tense is formed by placing the word *sei* ("will") before a verb:

Ha'u sei fó hahán ba sira – I *will* give them food.

The negative is formed by adding *la* ("not") between *sei* and the verb:

Ha'u sei la fó hahán ba sira – I *will not* give them food.

Aspects

Perfect

The perfect aspect can be formed by using *tiha ona*.

Ha'u han etu tiha ona – I have eaten rice / I ate rice.

When negated, *tiha ona* indicates that an action ceased to occur:

Ha'u la han etu tiha ona – I didn't eat rice anymore.

In order to convey that a past action had not or never occurred, the word *ladauk* ("not yet" or "never") is used:

Ha'u ladauk han etu – I didn't eat rice / I hadn't eaten rice.

Progressive

The progressive aspect can be obtained by placing the word *hela* ("stay") after a verb:

Sira serbisu hela. – They're (still) working.

Imperative

The imperative mood is formed using the word *ba* ("go") at the end of a sentence, hence:

Lee surat ba! – Read the letter!

The word *lai* ("just" or "a bit") may also be used when making a request rather than a command:

Lee surat lai – Just read the letter.

When forbidding an action *labele* ("cannot") or *keta* ("do not") are used:

Labele fuma iha ne'e! – Don't smoke here!

Keta oho sira! – Don't kill them!

Orthography and phonology

The influence of Portuguese and to a lesser extent Malay/Indonesian on the phonology of Tetun has been extensive.

Tetum Vowels

	<u>Front</u>	<u>Central</u>	<u>Back</u>
<u>Close</u>	<u>i</u>		<u>u</u>
<u>Mid</u>	<u>e</u>		<u>o</u>
<u>Open</u>		<u>ä</u>	

In the tetun language, /a/, /i/ and /u/ tend to have relatively fixed sounds. However /e/ and /o/ vary according to the environment they are placed in, for instance the sound is slightly higher if the proceeding syllable is /u/ or /i/.^[20]

Tetum consonants

	<u>Labial</u>	<u>Alveolar</u>	<u>Palatal</u>	<u>Velar</u>	<u>Glottal</u>
<u>Nasal</u>	<u>m</u>	<u>n</u>	(<u>ɲ</u> ~ <u>ɲ̃</u>)	(<u>ŋ</u>)	
<u>Stop</u>	(<u>p</u>) <u>b</u>	<u>t</u> <u>d</u>		<u>k</u> (<u>g</u>)	<u>ʔ</u>
<u>Fricative</u>	<u>f</u> (<u>v</u>)	<u>s</u> (<u>z</u>)	(<u>ʃ</u>) (<u>ʒ</u>)		<u>h</u>
<u>Approximant</u>			<u>j</u>	<u>w</u>	
<u>Lateral</u>		<u>l</u>	(<u>ɭ</u> ~ <u>ɭ̃</u>)		
<u>Flap</u>		<u>ɾ</u>			
<u>Trill</u>		(<u>r</u>)			

All consonants appearing in parenthesis are used only in loanwords.

Stops: All stops in Tetum are un-aspirated, meaning an expulsion of breath is absent. In contrast, English stops namely 'p' 't' and 'k' are generally aspirated.

Fricatives: /v/ is an unstable voiced labio-dental fricative and tends to alternate with or is replaced by /b/; e.g. [a' vo:] – [a' bo:] meaning *grandparent*.^[18]

As Tetum did not have any official recognition or support under either Portuguese or Indonesian rule, it is only recently that a standardised orthography has been established by the National Institute of Linguistics (INL). The standard orthography devised by the institute was declared official by Government Decree 1/2004 of 14 April 2004.^[21] However, there are still widespread variations in spelling, one example being the word *bainhira* or "when", which has also been written as *bain-hira*, *wainhira*, *waihira*, *uaihira*. The use of "w" or "u" is a reflection of the pronunciation in some rural dialects of *Tetun-Terik*.

The current orthography originates from the spelling reforms undertaken by Fretilin in 1974, when it launched literacy campaigns across East Timor, and also from the system used by the Catholic Church when it adopted Tetum as its liturgical language during the Indonesian occupation. These involved the transcription of many Portuguese words that were formerly written in their original spelling, for example, *educação* → *edukasaun* "education", and *colonialismo* → *kolonializmu* "colonialism".

Reforms suggested by the International Committee for the Development of East Timorese Languages (IACDETL) in 1996 included the replacement of the digraphs "nh" and "lh" (borrowed from Portuguese, where they stand for the phonemes /ɲ/ and /ʎ/) by "ñ" and "l̃", respectively (as in certain Basque orthographies), to avoid confusion with the consonant clusters /nh/ and /lh/, which also occur in Tetum. Thus, *senhor* "sir" became *señór*, and *trabalhador* "worker" became *trabañadór*. Later, as adopted by IACDETL and approved by the INL in 2002, "ñ" and "l̃" were replaced by "ñ" and "ll" (as in Spanish). Thus, *señór* "sir" became *señór*, and *trabañadór* "worker" became *traballadór*. Some linguists favoured using "ny" (as in Catalan and Filipino) and "ly" for these sounds, but the latter spellings were rejected for being similar to the Indonesian system, and most speakers actually pronounce ñ and ll as [ɲ̃] and [l̃̃], respectively, with a semivowel [ɲ̃] which forms a diphthong with the preceding vowel (but reduced to [n], [l] after /i/), not as the palatal consonants of Portuguese and Spanish. Thus, *señór*, *traballadór* are pronounced [seɲ̃ 'noɾ], [tɾabaɲ̃la 'doɾ], and *liña*, *kartilla* are pronounced ['lina], [kaɾ 'tila]. As a result, some writers use "in" and "il" instead, for example *Juinu* and *Juilu* for June and July (*Junho* and *Julho* in Portuguese).

As well as variations in the transliteration of Portuguese loanwords, there are also variations in the spelling of indigenous words. These include the use of double vowels and the apostrophe for the glottal stop, for example *boot* → *bot* "large" and *ki'ik* → *kiik* "small".

The sound [z], which is not indigenous to Tetum but appears in many loanwords from Portuguese and Malay, often changed to [s] in old Tetum and to [ʒ] (written "j") in the speech of young speakers: for example, *meja* "table" from Portuguese *mesa*, and *kamija* "shirt" from Portuguese *camisa*. In the sociolect of Tetum that is still used by the generation educated during the Indonesian occupation, [z] and [ʒ] may occur in free variation. For instance, the Portuguese-derived word *ezemplu* "example" is pronounced [e 'ʒemplu] by some speakers, and conversely *Janeiru* "January" is pronounced [zan 'eiru]. The sound [v], also not native to the language, often shifted to [b], as in *serbisu* "work" from Portuguese *serviço* (also note that a modern INL convention promotes the use of *serbisu* for "work" and *servisu* for "service").

See also

- Languages of East Timor
- The Lord's Prayer in Tetum at Wikisource

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